



## Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

### Cleaning Flooded Wood Floors and Woodwork

- Before the house has dried out, scrub floors and woodwork with a stiff brush, plenty of water, a detergent, and a disinfectant. Remove all mud and silt from corners, cracks, and crevices.
- Mold and mildew are common problems with wet wood.
  - Badly infected wood must be replaced.
  - Clean mildewed floors, woodwork, and other wooden parts by scrubbing with a mild alkali, such as washing soda or trisodium phosphate.
  - Use 4 to 6 tablespoons for each gallon of water.
  - Rinse well with clear water after scrubbing with alkali and allow the wood to dry thoroughly. Then apply a mildew-resistant finish.
  - To remove mildew stains or mold from unpainted wood surfaces, wash with warm soapy water. If stains remain, add 1/2 tablespoon of trisodium phosphate or 4 tablespoons of borax to each gallon of warm soapy water.
  - Dry by rubbing with an absorbent cloth.
  - If mold has grown into the wood under paint or varnish, the finish must be removed. Scrub the wood with an abrasive cleaner, then wash with a solution containing 4 to 6 tablespoons of trisodium phosphate and 1 cup of household chlorine bleach for each gallon of water.
  - Sand the wood and bleach any remaining spots. Several applications of household bleach may be needed. Then wash the surface with a weak ammonia solution with 2 tablespoons of ammonia per quart of water.
  - Finally, rinse the wood well with clear water. Let wood dry thoroughly and apply a wood preservative before repainting or refinishing.
- Vinyl flooring and floor tile may need to be removed to allow drying of subfloor.
- Wooden floors should be dried gradually. Sudden drying could cause cracking or splitting. Some restoration companies can accelerate drying time by forcing air through the fluted underside of hardwood floorboards.

- Once floors have dried, assess whether your floors can be repaired, replaced or recovered.
  - Consider your time and budget as you make any decisions.
  - If hardwood floors are damaged beyond repair, you may want to forego the cost of replacement and instead cover them with carpeting, vinyl, or linoleum. Or you might lay a new floor over the old, rather than replace it.
  - Plywood subfloors may have separated due to excessive moisture, causing buckling.
  - Sections may have to be replaced or have new plywood nailed over them. Consult a contractor for this work.
  - If buckling or warping has occurred, drive nails where the floor tends to lift or bulge. This will prevent further damage. Badly warped hardwood floors usually cannot be repaired. Warped, wide pine board flooring, however, will often flatten out after it has thoroughly dried.
  - Plane or sand floors level. Do not refinish until thoroughly dry.

*Adapted from resource material developed by the Iowa State Extension Service and resource material developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Service entitled "The Disaster Handbook for Extension Agents"*